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Nota di contenuto	Frontmatter -- Contents -- Acknowledgments -- 1. MOBY-DICK AND THE AMERICAN CANON -- Posthumanist Theory and Canon Formation -- A Genealogical History of the Reception of Moby-Dick, 1850-1945 -- The New Americanist "Field-Imaginary" and the Vietnam War -- The New Americanists and Moby-Dick -- The Limits of the New Americanist Discourse -- 2. METAPHYSICS AND SPATIAL FORM: MELVILLE'S CRITIQUE OF SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY AND FICTION -- Tragic Vision and Metaphysics -- Tragic Vision and Moby-Dick -- Melville's Errant Measure: The Testimony of the Fiction Following Moby-Dick -- 3. THE ERRANT ART OF MOBY-DICK -- The Question of Ishmael's Name -- Ishmael's Reading of Father Mapple's Reading of the Jonah Text -- The Centered Circle, the Imperial Gaze, and Abasement -- The American Adam and the Naming of the White Whale -- Ishmael and the Unnaming of Moby Dick -- Ishmael, Theory, and Practice -- The Self as Orphan -- Ishmael and Negative Capability -- Representation and Errancy: The Art of Narration -- Cetology and Discipline -- Political

Economy in Moby-Dick: Toward a Counterhegemony -- Repetition and the Indissoluble Continuum of Being: Melville's Polis -- Moby-Dick as Diabolic Book -- The Question of Ishmael's Name: A Repetition -- The Struggle to appropriate Moby-Dick: Indeterminacy and Positionality -- 4. MOBY-DICK AND THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN OCCASION -- The "Vietnam Syndrome" -- Fredric Jameson and Frank Lentricchia: Reading Michael Herr's Dispatches -- The Postmodernity of the Vietnam War -- Moby-Dick and the Vietnam War -- Notes -- Bibliography -- Index

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Sommario/riassunto

In *The Errant Art of Moby-Dick*, one of America's most distinguished critics reexamines Melville's monumental novel and turns the occasion into a meditation on the history and implications of canon formation. In *Moby-Dick*—a work virtually ignored and discredited at the time of its publication—William V. Spanos uncovers a text remarkably suited as a foundation for a "New Americanist" critique of the ideology based on Puritan origins that was codified in the canon established by "Old Americanist" critics from F. O. Matthiessen to Lionel Trilling. But Spanos also shows, with the novel still as his focus, the limitations of this "New Americanist" discourse and its failure to escape the totalizing imperial perspective it finds in its predecessor. Combining Heideggerian ontology with a sociopolitical perspective derived primarily from Foucault, the reading of *Moby-Dick* that forms the center of this book demonstrates that the traditional identification of Melville's novel as a "romance" renders it complicitous in the discourse of the Cold War. At the same time, Spanos shows how New Americanist criticism overlooks the degree to which *Moby-Dick* anticipates not only America's self-representation as the savior of the world against communism, but also the emergent postmodern and anti-imperial discourse deployed against such an image. Spanos's critique reveals the extraordinary relevance of Melville's novel as a post-Cold War text, foreshadowing not only the self-destructive end of the historical formation of the American cultural identity in the genocidal assault on Vietnam, but also the reactionary labeling of the current era as "the end of history." This provocative and challenging study presents not only a new view of the development of literary history in the United States, but a devastating critique of the genealogy of ideology in the American cultural establishment.

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